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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether reading aloud to young children would have an effect on their reading success in first grade. Subjects, 45 first-grade students in Wood-Ridge, New Jersey, were given a questionnaire to be completed by their parents. The three first-grade teachers provided students reading aptitude scores, based on teacher observation and test scores from the MacMillan/McGraw-Hill "A New View" reading series. The questionnaires were returned on a voluntary basis with a response rate of 84.44%. Students were divided into two first-grade based upon whether they were rich or poor in their literacy experiences. A t-test was used to analyze the differences, if any, between the reading questionnaire/achievement of the samples. Results indicated that there was almost a 24-point difference between the mean grade achievement of the samples at the end of the second quarter and this difference was highly significant. There was no strong evidence however to support that reading to children at a young age would better help them succeed in first grade. (Contains 2 tables of data; related research, 25 references, and a sample letter and questionnaire are appended.) (CR)

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ED 405 547

Reading Aloud To Young Children and Their Reading Success in First Grade

by
Marlo Lippman

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ABSTRACT

A descriptive study examined whether reading aloud to young children would have an effect on their reading success in first grade. Forty-five (45) first grade students in Wood-Ridge, New Jersey, were given a questionnaire to be completed by their parents. They were returned on a voluntary basis with a response rate of 84.44 percent. The results indicated that there was no strong evidence to support that reading to children at a young age would better help them succeed in first grade.

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I would like to express my appreciation to my family for their support, guidance and most of all for their love.

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September has arrived again. I watch as the children enter the first grade classroom, each one trying to find a desk with their name tag on it. Some find it with ease while others' eyes begin to well with tears because they are unable to find or read their name. As the year gets under way I notice startling differences between the reading abilities of these young children. Johnny came in to first grade reading Goosebumps books and other chapter books while Michael could barely read his own name. The results from a basic skills test indicates that I have children working on pre-K levels up to third grade levels. As always I sit and ponder; What is it that may contribute to this wide range of reading abilities. Are children who have been exposed to literature and read aloud to in their early years of life the ones that are rich with literary experiences?

It has been a common quote used around the world that "reading begins at home." The role of parents in the education of their children has become one of the most prominent aspects in the reform movement in education (Smith, 1988). In *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, Anderson and colleagues concluded, "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (1985). For years now researchers and educators have been advising parents to start to read to their children at an early age.

If this is the case not only could this help educators but it could also help parents to better help their children succeed at an early age. Knowing that exposing their children to literature at a young age could help them become better readers, or on the other hand, create "hurried readers" (Werner and Stother, 1987).This knowledge may teach parents how to best help their children begin on the road to success.

During the 1960s Dolores Durkin (1966) began the study of early readers, the scientific evidence that she presented indicated that reading readiness in children was clearly associated with their having been read to routinely as preschoolers. After this was discovered additional research was performed that established that reading readiness and the acquisition of reading skills were closely tied to school achievement (Jencks, 1972).

Michener (1988) has found research to support the following statements about reading aloud to children:

- It helps them get off to a better start in reading.
- It improves their listening skills.
- It increases their abilities to read independently.
- It expands their vocabularies.
- It improves their reading comprehension.
- It helps them become better speakers.
- It improves their abilities as writers.
- It improves the quantity and quality of independent reading.

Regie Routman (1991) states that reading aloud is seen as the single most influential factor in young children's success in learning to read. Additionally reading aloud improves listening skills, builds vocabulary, aids reading comprehension, and has a positive impact on student's attitudes toward reading. Burns, Roe and Ross (1985) also support this and add that by preparing and telling stories, children also develop poise and builds self-esteem.

Not only has research (Altwerger, Diehl-Faxon, and Dockstader-Anderson, 1985) concluded that it is important to read to children at a young age, but it has also shown that it is important for parents to model reading themselves, to show that they are readers too. The parents become a visual model for their children to imitate. That suggests one explanation of why research regularly has shown the value of reading aloud to children-the parent demonstrates with visual impact that she/he is interested in reading and in the books that have value for the child.

Frank Smith (1992) believes that children learn from the company they keep. He states that two groups of people ensure that a child learns to read and perceives reading as enjoyable. The first group includes those who read to the child, parents, siblings and teachers. They determine whether the child takes the crucial step of joining the "literacy club". The second group is the authors of the books children love to read. They provide the favorite stories that children know be heart or the predictable stories in which it is obvious what the next word will be before it is encountered.

Jim Trelease (1985), Paul Copperman (1986), and the educators they cite strongly believe that if parents read aloud and instilled the love of reading in their children at an early age there would be no reason for remedial classes to exist. In some cases motivation to read may even overcome reading problems. When Cushla was born her doctors predicted that she would be severely retarded. Despite this grim prognosis Cushla's parents read up to fifteen books a day to her. The result was that Cushla taught herself to read by the age of four (Butler, 1975).

First grade teachers are faced with the same challenges of children coming to their classroom, each one bringing with them their own experiences, prior

knowledge and attitudes towards reading. The teacher is then faced with the fact that these six year olds have come with varying degrees of reading abilities. Some children don't understand the left to right principle while others are already reading. If teachers were aware of the reading habits in each child's household it could help them to better understand each individual child and not to assume that every child needs to start from the basics.

Programs may need to be adjusted to meet the needs of the children who come to school with prior knowledge, or on the other hand have not had many experiences with literature. While a teacher may need to work on vocabulary development and story concept with the less read to children, those with a reading background may need to be moved into independent reading experiences quickly to prevent boredom and to take advantage of the already established disposition to reading (Watt 1989). Procedures in data to obtain such information would be helpful but the question of whether differences in literary activities in the home produce differences in achievement remain unanswered. How much literature is necessary? Is there an optimal amount?

HYPOTHESIS

To provide some evidence on this topic, the following study was undertaken. It was hypothesized that there would be no significant difference between two samples of first grade children's reading achievement when examined based on the extent of early literary experience.

PROCEDURES

A closed form questionnaire , on reading habits, was distributed to three first grade classes in an elementary school in Wood-Ridge, New Jersey. The participants involved were 45 students from a mostly white middle class neighborhood. 38 questionnaires were returned on a voluntary basis yielding a response of 84.44%. The questionnaire and cover letter was approved by the Superintendent of Schools prior to distribution.

The three first grade teacher (the researcher being one of them) provided the researcher with the children's reading aptitude scores, based on teacher observation and test scores from the Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, A New View reading series. The questionnaire was then analyzed and the results classified into categories: rich literacy experience and poor literacy experience. The children were then divided into two samples based on whether they were rich or poor in their literary experiences. A t test was used to analyze the differences, if any, between the reading questionnaire/achievement of the samples.

RESULTS

Table I shows there was almost a 24 point difference between the mean grade achievement of the samples at the end of the second quarter and this difference was highly significant.

Table I

Means, Standard Deviations and t of the
Samples' Pre-Experiment Scores

Sample	M	SD	t
Good Readers	90.9483	4.63362	5.62857
Poor Readers	67.0000	22.0593	

As can be seen in Table II there was a difference of 26 minutes.

Table II

Means, Standard Deviations and t of the
Samples' Pre-Experiment Scores

Sample	M	SD	t
Good Readers	104.76	53.47	1.33
Poor Readers	78.89	41.97	

There was no significance in the amount of time parents read to their children weekly and their reading achievement, this difference was statistically not significant.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study did not really support the research that reading to children at an early age can prepare and help children succeed, at an early age, in reading. This could be due to that the questionnaires were all not answered honestly or because such a small sample was taken.

Even though the data gathered in this study was not significant, I hope that parents and teachers alike understand the importance of reading to their children at an early age. Not only is it important so that the child is well prepared for his/her early years in school, but the most significant of all, to instill the love of reading.

Reading Aloud To Young Children and Their Reading Success

RELATED RESEARCH

Researchers and educators alike have strongly agreed that exposing children to literature at an early age has a tremendous influence on the child's intellectual growth. Study after study has shown the importance of parents/guardians involvement and the effect on the child's educational development. Researchers have been studying this happening as early as newborn infants. May L. Becker (1936) claimed that the love of reading was instilled by the recitation of nursery rhymes at the cradle. Numerous books have been written to educate parents how to best help their children succeed, including the first edition of Nancy Larrick's *A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading* (1958) which recommends many different stories that are appropriate for infants 1 and under.

Resnick and colleagues (1987) observed specific behaviors of mothers sharing books with their infants. by doing this they hoped to identify effective techniques that parents could use to enhance their child's reading readiness. These researchers discovered that sharing a book is an important activity in the process of socializing children. In addition to having their vocabulary enlarged, infants are taught how one is expected to handle and treat a book. They learn which bodily movements are permissible and which are disruptive in a book centered transaction. They also discover the emotional weight that their caregiver attaches to the activity of reading. Their goal was to ascertain what associations existed between specific maternal reading behaviors and infants' intellectual development.

Linda Leonard Lamme and Athol B. Packer (1986) studied bookreading behaviors of infants. Their research pinpoints the different behaviors that infants engage in during bookreading time, thus showing parents that just because their babies don't appear to be interested they are still learning from the experience. From their

research they developed a bookreading scale that provides a rough guideline of expectancies for parents who wonder about the values of reading to infants. They reported four general areas of reading behaviors for children up to fifteen months of age, including; visual, tactile, verbal and affective. Additionally they discussed the developmental growth stages in each area. The following behaviors were observed:

- Birth to 3 months, "receptive bookreading"-simple responses such as; to sit and listen or not, looking away from the gook and, later, arching their backs prior to crying.
- 3 to 6 months, "random book awareness"-the child is more aware of the book. They may scratch, pat tap, rub and grab the book. Behaviors appear somewhat arbitrary and lack consistency.
- 6 to 9 months, "considered book involvement"-infants make premeditated decisions to put books in their mouth or try to turn pages. They are more active during bookreading time.
- 9 months to one year, "active book reading"-the child is integrally involved in the bookreading process. They can tell the front from the back of the book and place it right side up. They can also help turn the pages.
- 12 to 15 months, "joint reading"-The children don't like to sit still for a long period of time now that they can walk or crawl. Reading sessions are short except for bedtime and naptime.

They found this to be of importance because a significant determinant of the success of infant bookreading is the parent's responsiveness to the infant's developmental level, the information in the scale can be useful to parents and caregivers.

Flood (1977) conducted a study in which he tape-recorded reading sessions in which parents read to their preschoolers. There were no specific instructions given to the reader during these sessions. Flood then recorded the frequency and type of

interaction that was evident. He analyzed the data and concluded that there was a need for the child to interact with the reader (their parent) to extend ideas, to question their understanding and to relate their ideas to experience. Flood feels it is important that there is verbal interaction during story time. He says that some warm-up questions that prepare the child for reading, talking during reading that relates story content to the child's experience, and post story questioning on the story ending, help prepare that child to become a successful reader.

Teale (1981) has also done much research on mother-child reading interactions. Teale sees the mother's reading reactions as primarily unconscious responses. In the early stages mothers will tend to label what is being read by supplying both the question and the answer which allows the child to answer as the reading experiences continues and the child's vocabulary develops. As the child matures the questions will change from labeling, to interpreting pictures and eventually to reading and eliciting questions from the print. This provides for an on going dialogue. "The adult expects the child to listen to particular segments of text, to learn from the information contained in the material, and remember the content so it can be conveyed to the adult in the questioning which follows each text segment" (Teale, 1981, p.9).

Even though children from different socioeconomic backgrounds may be read to at an early age, Teale expresses that these differences will effect the reading ability of the child. The way that parents read to their child may be sociocultural thus working class and middle class parents read differently. This may contribute to the fact that children from working class families in general have a more difficult time learning to read than those from a middle class family.

Unlike Teale, Dolores Durkin (1966) found that neither socioeconomic class or IQ proved to be a reliable indicator in the prediction of early readers. She found that home factors have more of an influence on the child's reading success than socioeconomic factors. Durkin states, "the presence of parents who spend time with their children; who read to them; who answer their questions and requests for help; and who demonstrate in their own lives that reading is a rich source of relaxation and contentment are the important factors in the lives of early readers."

Indrisano (1980) also agrees with Durkin in that Teachers of beginning reading have long observed that children who were read to in their preschool years are more prepared for formal reading instruction and are more successful in learning to read than are children who were not read to before entering school. Jencks (1972) established that reading readiness and the acquisition of reading skills were closely tied to school achievement.

To support much of this research Michener (1988) conducted a study involving reading to children at an early age and he concluded that it helped the children get off to a better start in reading than those who did not have this experience. Reading aloud helped to improve their listening skills and increased their ability to read independently. It expanded their vocabularies and improved their reading comprehension, along with becoming better speakers and writers. Michener (1988) states that overall reading aloud improves the quantity and quality of independent reading.

Other factors are noted to assist children towards being a successful reader and for having a love of books. Polly Berends (1987) believes that books can provide children with love, emotional security, friendship, and guidance. Along with

Copperman (1982) who suggests that it draws on the parent/child bond. The physical contact of sitting in a parent's lap while being read to strengthens this bond. Reading is then an expression of love which provides security and through association the feeling carries over to books.

Mason and Blanton (1971) chose a stratified sampling of 180 three, four and five year olds to identify and quantify the reading interests of preschool children. The following questions were asked to these children: "Do you like stories read to you?", "What stories do you like to hear best?", and "What stories would you like to read if you could read all by yourself?" All the preschoolers revealed an interest in being read to. The majority of children expressed an interest in fairy tales, followed by animal stories, television character stories, and stories about machines. A significant percentage of the children expressed a preference for the same story to be read to them or read by them. It is important for parents and educators to choose books that will hold the reading interests of these young children.

Not only has research been conducted that involved parents reading to their children and the effects but research has also been done showing parents as models. Cousert (1978) found that the most powerful influence on children's success in elementary school was the amount of time they saw their parents reading. Whether parents were reading the newspaper, a magazine or just searching for information, the frequency of that image was even more influential than was reading aloud to children.

As Cousert found that direct reading to children was not the only success factor Melton (1985) also determined that parental involvement did not adequately describe parents whose children succeeded in reading. He discovered that parents

of successful children actually discussed their own reading of the books that their children read in school and at home. The parents showed a personal interest in the intellectual life of their children, especially as it related to books. They wanted to know if their children were enjoying what they read along with gaining knowledge and information. Carl Smith (1988) agrees that being read to is not enough. Like the above researchers he found that other home factors influence children's reading behaviors. Smith studied the impact of parents as a visual model for their children. He noticed that children imitate their parents much like athletes use video movies to improve their game. He concluded that the frequency of parents reading was more influential than was reading aloud to children.

Feitelson, Kiata and Goldstein (1986) conducted an experimental study of disadvantaged first graders in an effort to improve Israeli children's reading proficiency. These children were described as coming from homes where parents did not or rarely read to them. The effects of reading a series format story in the school setting over a period of six months was examined for positive results. The experimental group scored significantly higher on measures of decoding, reading comprehension and active use of language than the control group. Furthermore many children in the experimental group coaxed their families into buying books and began to read on their own.

Schools are aware of how important it is for parents to be active participants in their child's education. Every year at back-to-school night Wood-Ridge schools of New Jersey hands out many flyers and display an array of books that inform parents how to best help their child succeed. One of the pamphlets that is handed out is from The National PTA titled *Help Your Young Child Become A Good READER.*

In this pamphlet David Elkind (1989) is quoted, "sound early education is an extension of the home, not of the school."

The National PTA suggest that it is important to help the young child understand why we read. children can develop an understanding of this if given the opportunity to see the parent reading and writing a variety of different materials. They suggest that it is also important to provide different materials (such as books, magazines, newspapers, a tape recorder and tapes with songs and stories, a small chalkboard, cut-out letters and words that can be pieced together) for the children to play and interact with. Bringing the children to see different places that they have read about, like the zoo, (or vise a versa) can help learning be more meaningful and fun.

Reading aloud is strongly suggested in this pamphlet. It explains that reading aloud is the best way to help children become better readers and that it promotes a good attitude that will stay with them throughout the rest of their school days and even into adulthood. The National PTA makes the parents aware that studies that have been conducted of good readers and early readers have had one person coach them (parent, siblings, relatives, older friends) in reading. Tips are given to encourage discussion to promote thinking skills and imagination.

Many parents ask the question, should I push my child to read? There is no evidence that pushing you child to read creates a better reader. In fact the opposite has been found to be true in that it can have a negative influence with long-term consequences, such as promoting a bad attitude toward reading and books. Pressure to read and perform at a very early age can sometimes lead children to be cautious and afraid of making mistakes. (Challman, 1939). Having parents or teachers setting standards that are beyond the child's ability can create a "hurried

reader"(Werner and Strother, 1987). They define this as a child who is experiencing frustration, anxiety, and a strong need for autonomy, thus having difficulty relating with peers. The National PTA claim that children who are early readers push themselves to read rather than being pushed by their parents.

Researchers and educators alike have been advocating the importance of reading to children from an early age. Not only does it give them a head start in school but it also is important to their self image of being successful. With the knowledge and research that is currently available to parents, it is hoped that they will get involved and give their children this opportunity to thrive.

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January 23, 1997

Dear Parents:

I am currently working on a research project at Kean College. I am studying the reading habits of first grade children and their parents in an attempt to better understand the reading process. Your help in filling out the questionnaire on the back of this letter is an important part of my study.

The questionnaire should only take a few minutes of your time. Please answer the questions as honestly as you can. If you cannot remember specific ages, you may give approximate ages or leave it blank. Feel free to add any additional comments on you family's reading experiences.

I do not need your names, all responses will be kept anonymous. Please return this form to your child's classroom teacher by ***Wednesday, January 29th.***
Thank you for all your help.

Sincerely,

Marlo Lippman

Questionnaire

How old is your child? _____

Who normally reads to your child? Mother _____ Father _____ Other _____

How often does that person read to your child? Daily _____
3-4 times a week _____
Weekly _____

For how many minutes? _____

At what age was reading to your child begun? _____

What types of materials are read to your child (books, magazines)? _____

At what age did your child show an interest in books? Looking at? _____
Recognizing words? _____
Memorizing or retelling the story? _____

Did your child show a preference in reading materials? Yes _____ No _____

At what age did this occur? _____

Did your child listen to read along tapes with books? Yes _____ No _____

Is your child reading independently? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, at what age did this occur? _____

In his/her leisure time, how often does your child choose to read independently? Daily _____
Weekly _____
Hardly ever _____

Does your child see you read at home? Daily _____ Weekly _____ Hardly ever _____

Were you read to as a child? Yes _____ No _____

Is your child still being read to? Yes _____ No _____

At what time? before bedtime _____ other _____
describe